of 180 per cent and whereas employees working at the lower level are getting only 40 per cent benefit. Something has to be done by the Government. If necessary, it should be revised. For giving benefit, parity should be there. If it is being given on the basis of a percentage, then it should be 100 per cent for all or 40 per cent for all. A Group 'A' officer gets 150 per cent benefit on account of the Pay Commission whereas Group 'C' and Group 'D' people get only 40 per cent? It amounts to discrimination and it requires to be looked into.

Now I come to a very serious issue which is merger of banks. My personal experience as Member of the Lok Sabha earlier and as Member of the Rajya Sabha now is that banks have become state within state. We approached the Central Government and various State Government Departments in the capacity of people's representatives. There may be an issue of loan. There may be an issue of recovery.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr. Rashtrapal, please. A statement has to be made by the Minister.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Recent Developments in Sri Lanka

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): I rise to apprise this august House of the recent developments in Sri Lanka.

The situation in Sri Lanka is of serious concern to the Government, in particular the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Northern part of Sri Lanka. We are concerned about the plight of the civilians caught in the hostilities and the growing number of internally displaced persons. We have emphasised to the Sri Lankan Government that the safety and the security of the civilians must be safeguarded at all costs and that food and essential supplies be allowed to reach them unhindered. We have been assured that the safety and well being of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka will be taken care of. In this connection, Member of Parliament and Senior Adviser to the President of Sri Lanka, hon. Basil Rajapaksa is due to visit India shortly.

Let me reiterate our conviction that there in no military solution to the ethnic conflict. What is required in Sri Lanka is a peacefully negotiated political settlement within the framework of a united Sri Lanka respecting the legitimate rights of the minorities including the Tamil community. The rights and the welfare of the Tamil community of Sri Lanka should not get enmeshed in the ongoing hostilities against the LTTE. We encourage the Government of Sri Lanka to continue to nurture the democratic process in the Eastern Province as well.

The Government has also taken up with the Sri Lankan Government the need to ensure the safety of our fishermen. While it is important for our fishermen to respect the International Maritime Boundary Line, we have impressed on the Sri Lankan Navy to desist from firing on Indian fishermen. Our two Governments have agreed to work towards concluding practical arrangements to prevent such incidents.

Re: Clarifications with regard to statement by Minister about Development in Sri Lanka

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Clarifications will be later. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRIMATI BRINDA KARAT (West Bengal) : Sir, when? ...*(Interruptions)*... We do not have any House after 24th. ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No, no. We will fix up a time. You want to seek clarifications now. The statement was urgent and it was made in-between an on-going debate. We will fix it. ...*(Interruptions)*...

DR. V. MAITREYAN (Tamil Nadu) : When? ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI S.S. AHLUWALIA (Jharkhand) : Sir, it needs a discussion. Merely seeking clarifications will not serve the purpose. ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We will give an opportunity for clarifications. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI SITARAM YECHURY (West Bengal) : Sir, do you want to do it in-between? ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That is what I am saying. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: Sir, my problem is that I have some commitment. ...*(Interruptions)*... Mr. Deputy Chairman, Sir, I have an explanation. I had some commitment. That's why, we have made a departure from the normal practice of making the statement at 5.00 p.m. or before the rising of the House. But, as at that particular point of time, I will not be able, I wanted to make a statement and if hon. Members want, I can come tomorrow and I can give the clarifications to hon. Members. I will have no problem. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI SITARAM YECHURY: You fix up a time.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We will fix a time. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: Today, I have made the statement. The statement cannot be repeated again tomorrow. ...*(Interruptions)*... I have no problem. ...*(Interruptions)*... The Chair can decide. ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We will discuss it. We will fix up the time. ...*(Interruptions)*...

DR. V. MAITREYAN: He is saying that tomorrow, he will not be available. ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No, no. We will fix up a time. ...*(Interruptions)*...

Dr. Maitreyan, he himself has said tomorrow. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI SITARAM YECHURY: The House will be greatly satisfied if the hon. External Affairs Minister gives an assurance that he is available tomorrow.

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: I am available tomorrow. ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We will seek the time.

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: I gave notice to make the statement today because I made the statement in the other House. As I issued a statement in the other House, it is the Parliamentary propriety that I must make a statement in this House on the same day. This is a normal practice, and even in the Order Paper it was fixed at 5 P.M. But suddenly, some important business came which I could not avoid, and I thought that I would like to seek the indulgence of the House, through the Chair, to make the statement, and since an important debate is going on, perhaps, it would not be proper to have clarifications and detract the debate which is going on, and which is equally rather more important. But, at the same time, this issue agitates a large number of Members and people are expressing their deep concern over it, and I am happy that at least, I could read the statement here. Colleagues of Mr. Rajaji did not allow me to read the statement in the other House.

SHRI SITARAM YECHURY: We are the House of Elders.

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: That is the difference. Being the old ex-Member of this House, I have a little experience! So, I will be available tomorrow. I will make clarifications. But don't fix the time right now. It is a bad practice. Whatever the Business Advisory Committee decides and whatever time they indicate to me, I will come and reply to the clarifications.

SHRI T.K. RANGARAJAN (Tamil Nadu) : It is not appropriate.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You may say that. It is the practice. We will fix the time. Please sit down.

SHRI D. RAJA (Tamil Nadu): Will it be a discussion or will it be clarifications?

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: It will be clarifications.

SHRI D. RAJA: Then, the Chair should fix the time.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes, definitely. Mr. Praveen Rashtrapal, you can continue.

[THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (PROF. P.J. KURIEN) *in the Chair*]

THE APPROPRIATION (NO.3), BILL, 2008 *(contd.)*

SHRI PRAVEEN RASHTRAPAL: Thank you, Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir. I was referring to the merger of banks. I will give a specific example of merger of the State Bank of Saurashtra with the State Bank of India. The issue came up before us in one of the Department-related Standing Committees also. It may be a Government decision or a decision of the Finance Ministry in particular that a small bank may be merged with a big bank, and if that is the requirement of the new economic policy for the functioning of the bank, the Government can go ahead. But my experience and the experience of some of our MPs is that before doing so, it will be very appropriate if the Employees' Association and the Officers' Association in both the banks, the small bank and the big bank, are